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### Editorial

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## **Editorial**

**Claire Jenkins and Amy Burge**

This issue began life as a strand at the 2013 European Popular Culture Association Conference in Turku, Finland. Entitled ‘Gender and Sexuality in Popular Culture’, the strand itself covered a significant range of topics, from queer cinema to performative masculinity, and demonstrated the exciting scholarship that is being undertaken in the field of gender and sexuality studies in popular European culture. The special edition comprises papers proposed for and presented in this strand and, much like the conference itself, has an interdisciplinary focus, bringing together key texts and issues from the conference that demonstrate the broad nature of the subject matter. As organizers of the conference strand and editors of this special issue, our main aim is twofold: to explore gender and sexuality in popular culture produced by and consumed in Europe, and to showcase research on these materials by European scholars.

The articles gathered here indicate the way in which issues of gender and sexuality permeate a wide range of popular culture texts, including film and television, literature and music. Whilst the subject matter is diverse, what the scholarship presented here demonstrates is the cross-over between fields that shows the similarities, as well as the vast scope of the field of popular culture studies in Europe.

The past decade has seen increasing scrutiny of young female sexuality, and this is the theme of Anne Graefer’s paper exploring affective audience responses to the reality television programme *Geordie Shore* (2011–) through postings on social media sites. Probing the collocation of gender, sexuality and class, Graefer shows how *Geordie Shore*

pushes the boundaries of working-class femininity so it becomes more readily accepted, engendering gleeful laughter rather than derision.

Maternity is the subject of two articles in the issue: Charul Patel's 'Expelling a monstrous matriarchy: Casting Cersei Lannister as abject in *A Song of Ice and Fire*' and Ruth O'Donnell's close reading of the latest Bond film, *Skyfall* (Mendes, 2012). Identifying a familial narrative in the film, O'Donnell applies a Kleinian discourse, and Creed's model of the monstrous feminine, to demonstrate the way in which the character of M is positioned as the 'bad' or monstrous mother. O'Donnell uses this model to unpick concerns around masculinity and patriarchy, noting that the death of the mother (M (Judi Dench)) and of the queer alter-ego, Silva (Javier Bardem), casts out any notion of internalized homosexuality, allowing the male hero to reassert his masculinity and enter an Oedipal phase.

Monstrous maternity is the focus of Patel's analysis of the character Cersei Lannister in George R. R. Martin's book series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1999–). Drawing on the work of Julia Kristeva, Barbara Creed and Jacques Lacan, Patel argues that the simultaneous use of maternity and sexuality as incompatible tools of power (what Patel terms 'political prostheses') results in abjection for the fractured Cersei, who is thus expelled from the fictional society of the book series.

On occasion, individual figures loom large and offer rich and productive readings of gender and sexuality. Rosie White's paper explores the British actor Beryl Reed as a queer performer. White focuses particularly on the short-lived comedy programme *Beryl Reid Says... Good Evening* (1968) in which domestic space is often subverted and unsettled, and lesbian sexuality is frequently referenced. The destabilizing of expectations

around gender, sexuality and domesticity allows Reid to be perceived as a queer performer and a ground-breaking comedienne. The musician Morrissey, as Aileen Dillane, Martin J. Power and Eoin Devereux point out, offers a similarly queered presentation of gender and sexuality in his creative *oeuvre*. Initially famous for his role fronting the hugely popular and influential British band The Smiths, Morrissey has since honed a solo artistic career that has continually courted controversy, not least in his use of ‘queering strategies’ to question and subvert hegemonic ideas of gender and sexuality. Such strategies might be read as progressive, as indicative of a more liberal, permissive European cultural attitude towards gender and sexuality. This is certainly the case for Keeley Saunders, who posits that two European films, *Romeos* (Bernadi, 2011) and *Tomboy* (Sciamma, 2011), offer sympathetic and progressive depictions of transgender experience, moving away from more mainstream Hollywood representations of the ‘erasure’, ‘exploitation’ and ‘denigration’ of transgender experience. Other texts are less overt: Amy Burge uncovers, in both historical and contemporary popular romance fiction, a hegemonic masculinity that recognizes the contradictions that underpin its construction but cannot move away from heteronormative models. While playing with constructions of Orientalist masculinity, the performance as queer essentially functions as a way of restoring normativity.

The articles collected here do much to indicate the breadth of current European scholarship on gender and sexuality, and suggest the richness of contemporary and historical popular culture in Europe. Perhaps the most valuable contribution of this special issue is its shifting of the critical and cultural landscape within which these cultural texts are considered and consumed, from the dominant North America-UK

context, towards a trans-European idea of popular culture. As a snapshot of current scholarship being undertaken in Europe this special issue plays a vital role in commencing a dialogue on issues of gender and sexuality, and it is our hope that it will encourage further rigorous research on popular culture in non-anglophone European contexts.